Report Canada – October 23 – November 21, 2018 Impressions of Canada – the Parliament of the World's Religions/ PWR, Toronto – part 1 and part 2

I had hardly hit the dust of Toronto on October 23, when I was being whisked off to the last meeting of the Parliament of the World's Religions/PWR 2018, Toronto Steering Committee meeting. Connecting with the organisers in Chicago the last-minute details were being discussed. Are there enough volunteers to help out during the week? Is the app working? A sort of 'calm panic' ensued... As it turned out there were enough volunteers and the Parliament app was updated and worked. Many thanks for the tireless efforts of both committees! We often forget that events like this take so many, many months to organise.

PWR also depends on huge promotion – often again from people who work tirelessly and without financial gain. Quite often the promotion is also in the form of 'Pre-Parliament' events. In Toronto one of the groups who were most active in October was 'Witchfest North'. They organised the "Into the Nights-Oct 1-31, 2018" festival, a collaboration with Womynspirit Festival.

I was honoured to be invited to the "Full Moon Opening Night Exhibition Event" on October 24.
I gave my presentation ""Etruscans Myth & Magic" which seemed to be received very well. So much so that there wasn't enough time for the full moon ritual. Surrounded by some beautiful art work it was a delight to meet some witchy friends whom I had never met in person, only via email or social media. And of course it is always good to meet local people. Many thanks to Monica Bodirsky and her team for organising the whole evening.

I would see Monica and many more witches on Wednesday Oct 31 as we gathered together for the Witch Walk. The event announcement on Facebook "Join Catherine Starr, Monica Bodirsky and the Broom Crew to celebrate the success of Witchfest North, remember and honour our Ancestors, and welcome the world to Toronto and the Parliament of World's Religions. We will chant, dance and walk the labyrinth together as we celebrate Samhain and the diversity of our community."

And so we gathered and then proceeded to walk through the streets of Toronto to Trinity Square. That was quite a feat manoeuvring along the busy rush hour streets but as we entered the Square a calmness befell us all. There we formed a large circle as Catherine welcomed us in. Surrounded by beautiful trees and huge skyscrapers with neon flashing signs such as EXCEL it was quite surreal. Many other people from all different walks-of-life joined us on this memorable evening, also known as Hallowe'en/ Hallows Eve



(Selena Fox, from Circle Sanctuary and Morgana at the start of the Witchwalk)

Several Crones were called into the circle – including myself – to bless everyone. We were Crones of the Sky, of the Earth, of healing... and more. Leading the spiral dance Catherine, we circled past Rowan holding a cauldron of sacred water. Dropping the herbs we had been given the cauldron was filled to make a sweet-smelling concoction.

As the ceremony drew to a close, we celebrated the end of the Witchfest 'Into the Nights' month and the beginning of the PWR week November 1-7, 2018.

However before PWR started there was another 'pre-Parliament' event which I attended, namely - "The alchemy of women's collective wisdom and power".

Gathering at the Delta Hotel, just across from the South Building of the Toronto Metro Convention Centre/TMCC we were greeted by a couple of the ladies we had met online a few days earlier. We had been asked to bring a little water with us from home... or from a spot sacred to us. On the website we could familiarise ourselves with the programme:

"Core Committee welcomes all women and girls, and Live Streamers.

Kahontakwas **Diane Longboat**, Teacher and Leader from the Mohawk Nation, Turtle Clan, a traditional Teacher from Six Nations Grand River Territory, Canada has been lovingly working with us from the beginning of our planning stages over the past 6 months. She will be with us with other Indigenous Elders to open or circle and welcome us all to the land.

We are elevating Diane's vision of a **World Wide Web of Wisdom** as we gather in this sacred manner. This is the intention and spirit which all attendees will be contributing to.

Rev. Aina-Nia Ayo'dele will guide us in a traditional African Sacred Water ceremony. Everyone will participate in a Sacred Water Ceremony. While you contribute your water to our sacred vessel, we will also acknowledge and welcome your ancestors whose presence we will certainly feel."



(At the drum circle – Morgana)

Grouping together in small circles (and yes, I randomly picked number 13 ...) we first introduced ourselves and greeted each other. And what a diverse group of women it was. *Diversity* was a word we would hear constantly at Parliament but we weren't only honouring the differences but also acknowledging the land we were standing on and the people who had lived there for centuries. It was noticeable how often at the beginning of sessions the indigenous people and Canadians acknowledged the Spirits of the Land, a practice which many pagans and heathens also do automatically.

As the water was collected, we heard where it had come from and why the water was sacred to the person who brought it. As I poured my water into the jug, I told my story of the water coming from the Netherlands and the great rivers which flow into the Netherlands – the Rhine, the Meuse.

Later I would join the Indigenous folk at the opening outside the convention centre at the tipi they had set up for the duration of PWR. Although the fire was a sacred focal point in the opening ceremony, I couldn't help thinking it was the Rain Gods who were blessing us that afternoon.

Bob Goulais, Anishinaabe, hosted the opening and introduced several Elders who told their stories. Diane Longboat, Mohawk, was also present. Both Diane and Bob would be present during the Parliament week not only introducing other Elders but also giving their own speeches and facilitating workshops. I would have love to spend more time with Diane but as so often the case at Parliament there is never enough time to speak with everyone. Fortunately Diane is connected to URI and I am sure our paths will cross again.



(The Promise of Inclusion, the Power of Love, was the theme of the Parliament of World's Religions (PWR), held in Toronto, Canada from November $1^{st} - 7^{th}$, 2018.)

And so the procession to the Opening Ceremony began. It is always amazing to watch everyone coming in dressed in their robes, national dress and costumes.



(Opening ceremony PWR 2018)

Chief Ava Hill gave one of the opening speeches: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FM2a6Y9iu-k Chief Ava Hill Commends Interfaith Relationships & Reconciliation



(Six Nations Chief Ava Hill, photo courtesy of the Hamilton Spectator)

At the Opening Ceremony of the 2018 Parliament of the World's Religions in Toronto on Nov. 1, Ava Hill - Chief of the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve - graced the program with a beautiful welcome to the traditional lands on which the #2018Parliament was hosted on Nov. 1 - 7. In her opening address, she recalled vast and moving experiences working with a wide-range of religions in the work of reconciliation and told us the Parliament "is so important as it provides a venue for us to share our traditional spiritual knowledge that will provide inspiration and guidance for all of humanity as we continue to struggle with so many challenges in today's world."

Over the following 7 days, the 8300+ international attendees of the Parliament explored, "The Promise of Inclusion, the Power of Love: Pursuing Global Understanding, Reconciliation and Change." One of six major sub-themes was led by Indigenous Peoples, called "The Spiritual Evolution of Humanity and Healing Our Mother Earth."

During the Parliament I represented both *URI* and *PFI.*/ Pagan Federation International. One of the happy coincidences was that the Meet & Greet areas of both URI and the Pagan Community were next to each other. This made it very easy for me to meet people from both families.

At this Parliament the presence of pagans was more evident than the Parliaments I had attended in 2004/Barcelona and in 2015/ Salt Lake City. Many more indigenous voices are also being heard. The common denominator is our love of the Earth and our concerns about Climate Change, the lack of and access to fresh water and fresh clean air, sanitation and many other ecological issues. Sometimes the problems can be overwhelming and we feel powerless – however as we saw at this Parliament – literally every drop of help and action helps.

One of the first things I did was to lead a guided mediation during the morning Pagan Worship sessions. We had been designated Room 201 E in the North Building. It was clear even after my session – when about 45 people attended - that the room was too small! I would come back during the week to hear other pagans and heathens – and every time the room was overflowing. The room was NOT small by-the –way \odot

The theme of my guided mediation was "Autumn", with an emphasis on Samhain, or Hallowe'en, when we call our ancestors to join us. This is the time when we reaffirm life by acknowledging the passage through the veil. Everyone is subject to aging and the inevitability of death. However death is also a birth into a different reality. Often, we find solace with ancient trees and in autumn we can be inspired by the wonderful colours of Autumn. Knowing we are never really alone.



As part of the URI Communications team – with Sari Heidenreich, Erin Tamayo and Patrick Horn – we did livestreaming every morning. That was quite a learning curve, not to mention figuring out how to hold the phone to get the image vertical \bigcirc

(NB See the links to the recordings at the end of this report.)

Every morning at about 08:20 we did 30 minutes of broadcasting via Facebook. We aimed at interviewing speakers of the day. Our guests included **Sarah Oliver** from the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative, **Aline LaFlamme** from the Interspiritual Sustainability Society, **Emerson Finkle** from the Interfaith Chapel at the University of Rochester, *Valeria Vergani* from the Inspiritual Sustainability Council, **Girish Shah** from the Silicon Valley Interreligious Council, **Greg Davis** from Safe Alliance of Interfaith, **Rebecca Prows** from Interfaith Cafe on Storytelling in Interfaith Engagement, **Rev Lauren Van Ham** from the Chaplaincy Institute on Building a Global Environmental Network, (the URI EN CC panel), **Besha Blondin** from Pull Together Now and **Rev. Fletcher Harper** from Green Faith.



(Livestreaming with Patrick Horn and one of our guests, Besha Blondin from Pull Together Now)

On Wednesday we closed the livestreaming with the presentation of the *World Peace Flower*, created by Leo Lebendig, Germany to the URI Family worldwide.



(John Huculiak, Rowan Fairgrove and Morgana with the World Peace Flower)

At the Meet and Greet area there were many folders with information about the various URI CCs and of course there was chance to meet many of the people involved in URI. There was also a quiet area for contemplation and (reiki) healing. There were 30+ events where URI people were involved.

Frederica Helmiere, Multiregion Coordinator, made time to talk with many of the people involved in the CC's.... and many photos were made. Here is an impression:





(Frederica, Martha Gallahue and Joy Elkayam)



(Frederica, Morgana and Catherine Starr)

I was involved in 2 panels – the first one was about "Equipping Schools and Teachers to Provide Interfaith Education". Lead by **Heidi Rautionmaa**, the panel consisted further of **Arto Kallioniemi**, **Shlomo Alon**, **Abraham Karickam**, **Ann Aisatullin**, **Swamini Adityananda Parmarth**, **Navleen Kaur**. As educators it was interesting to hear how the problems connected to a multifaith society are being tackled. More often than not it is the carers/parents and teachers who need the Interfaith education!



I talked about the book "Interfaith education for all -Theoretical Perspectives and Best Practices for Transformative Action" Editors: **Duncan R. Wielzen**, and **Ina ter Avest**, ISBN 978-94-6351-170-4

launched in 2017. Duncan wrote, "Living together in the midst of diversity is an issue of pivotal importance all over the world, in particular for people involved in the education of the younger generation. The search intended in this publication is to find the means to go beyond mere tolerance of differences. Education as envisioned in this book engages learners in active citizenship and enables pupils and students – young people – to transform their social environment. Learning about the other, and – to a certain extent – appreciating the other's perspective, together with acquiring dialogical skills are key elements for learning to live together with people from different cultural backgrounds and with diverse religious and secular worldviews. Hence, faith development, *dialogicality* and citizenship are central themes in this publication"

After the panel discussion we all met later to discuss how to proceed further. Education is important on so many different levels that it is hoped to create a larger pool of interested people.



(Interfaith education for all with Heidi Rautionmaa, Navleen Kaur, Abraham Karickam and others.)

Part 2:

The second panel I was involved in was the Environmental Network CC, "Building a Global Environmental Network".

For several months the EN cc has been active in a pilot scheme connecting CC's in an 'Exchange program' Initiated by **Katherine Hreib** the scheme started in August 2018. One of the spin-offs has been organising the panel in such a way that the participants of the exchange program could share their projects. However bureaucracy got in the way and a couple of the planned speakers were unable to get the required visa to visit Canada and attend the Parliament.

See the live recording – links under references.

Not to be discouraged we were able to link up with Abhirup Khan, URI East India, via Skype. Also a couple of people stepped in at the last minute so that we could present a full programme. Hosted by Lauren van Ham, the panel session was opened by Rebecca Tobias. Acknowledging the Spirits of the Land she reminded us all of how all land is sacred and the importance of fresh and clean water and air.



(Rebecca Tobias)

Bishop Bill Swing, who foresaw the importance of environmental issues and envisaged a larger network of (URI) people engaged in problems associated with climate change, sanitation and so on, welcomed us He mentioned that 1/5 of all the URI cc's (about 200) were connected in some way with the environment. This perhaps underlines the sense of urgency we are all faced with – no matter where we live. Abhirup described the projects he was involved in and how important sanitation is to the survival of the people he was working with. It is not a luxury; it is a primary necessity, to ensure that the ground water is not polluted. The days of being polite are over; what Lauren had described to us as 'fierce courage' is that which is needed to make sure that people – of all ages – are engaged and committed.

Panellists also included: **Paula Looking Horse** / Dakota, **Swamini Adityananda Saraswati**/ Global Interfaith WASH Alliance and **Ed Bastian**/ The Interspiritual Sustainability Council

Here are some photos:



(Bishop Bill Swing – founder of URI)



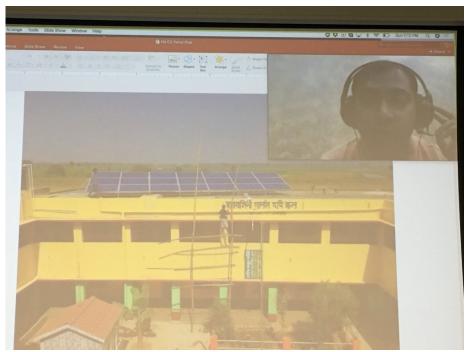
(Lauren van Ham)



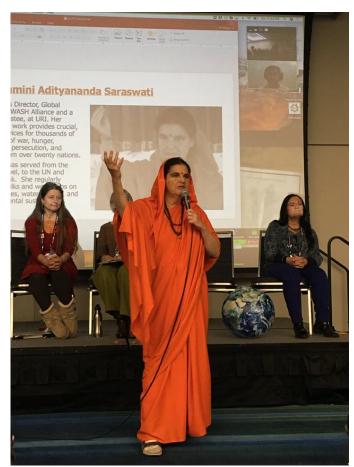
(Paula Looking Horse; an accomplished traditional Dakota singer and artist.)



(Morgana, URI Netherlands)



(Abhirup Khan from URI East India – via Skype)



(Swamini Adityananda Saraswati)

After the panel we reassembled at the hospitality area to continue our discussion. Later **Louise Mangan** (Convener, InterSpiritual Sustainability Council of BC)) wrote on her feelings about the ENCC and the Parliament (quote in red text):

"The most powerful aspect of the Parliament in Toronto for me was the experience of deep convergence around the spiritual/physical plight of the world. I felt a shared awareness that the physical plight of Earth is revealing the abyss of spiritual dis-ease that our institutional and economic cultures have exacerbated globally.

Decades ago, just when we began to understand how growth economies were degrading the natural world (including human beings) we allowed our governments to double down and intensify human inequities and environmental destruction on a worldwide scale. Perhaps too many of us were too privileged and too comfortable to want to see clearly. Now seeing is very, very painful.

I believe the regenerative grassroots paradigm that is trying to emerge — the convergence of movements that was palpable at the Parliament —may well make the difference between survival or extinction for human beings and many other complex species. There is no time to waste, and I expect that social resilience and environmental resilience combined, the work of climate justice, will be right at the heart of healing Earth and all beings for generations. (If not, survivability is in serious jeopardy.)

I was trying to explain when we were speaking in person at the Parliament that I value very dearly the simultaneous global, multiregional and regional relationships I am developing through URI. The social and environmental resilience work in which I'm now involved is simultaneously both local and place-based and globally a movement of movements. I sense we may quickly need to replicate for the ENCC the same pattern of simultaneous coordinators and connectivity for global, multiregional and regional work that we now have for URI as a whole.

The grief and hope I feel for Earth and all beings in this time is indistinguishable from my grief over climate-related injustice and suffering, and my hope for grassroots engagement in regenerating healthier cultures and healthier spiritualities.

I am moved to add that I fear the urgency and acceleration of the environmental crisis will almost certainly be manifest as economic collapse also, here in North America as elsewhere. What looks like failing states and geopolitics in other places is actually the story of failing aquifers and food supplies, followed by a market for weapons. A result of exploitive growth economies and the devastated ecosystems they leave behind. I'm sure I am preaching to the choir as I say all this."

It is our intention to continue and expand the connections we have made with the CC-exchange program – from Alaska to Australia.

The extent of the URI family was visibly evident when we gathered for the URI Reception. As I mentioned earlier not everyone who wanted to come to the Parliament made it. This was for a number of reasons – some people had problems getting visa's, others a lack of funding – whilst others couldn't attend because of health issues.

It was good to hear from **Victor Kazanjian, Kiran Bali**, who also gave key-note speeches during the plenaries and Sari and Frederica. To round off the reception **Pato Banton** sang a song dedicated to URI. He and his band had given a concert earlier. He truly embodies the spirit of URI when he gave us all a

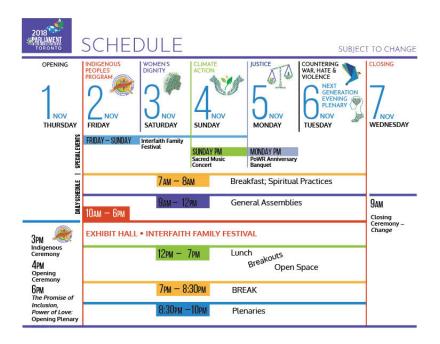
copy of the double album called "All in this together". 30 musicians from the numerous CC's worldwide worked together on this project.

It was fun dancing together!



(Multiregion STRONG! 38 people here, representing 19 CCs, At the URI Reception)

There are so many things which I joined in – and many more things which I missed. Spread over 2 main buildings – North & South – if was really hard to make a choice. Here is a general overview. Each day was designated a particular subject and during the General Assemblies we heard key-note speakers



Some other highlights:

Attending **Langar** of course. Provided by the Sikh Community, Toronto, Langar, which means 'kitchen' is the free meal offered at Sikh temples every day worldwide. It's always an amazing experience – eating a simple but nourishing vegetarian meal with literally thousands of people at once. Served by Sikhs everything is done on a voluntary basis, although I understand that every Sikh donates 10% of their income to the temple (Dasvandh).

Meeting pagans and heathens is always interesting. At the Pagan Meet & Greet there was a steady stream of new and old friends. **Karen Dales**, as guest columnist, wrote a report at The Wild Hunt: "Column: The View from Pagan Meet and Greet at PWR".

This is a group photograph at the Pagan Meet & Greet:



(Pagans in the Meet and Greet Richard James retired HP of the WCC, Morgana Sythove of Pagan Federation International, Devyn, Karen Dales of the Toronto Pagan Pub Moot, Rev. Selena Fox of Circle Sanctuary, Scarlet Jory of the Crescent Moon School of Magic and Paganism, Trey Capnerhurst of Silver Song Collective, George Thompson a HP of the WCC, and Brandon Fox)

Flame of Frith: Frigga Asraaf from the Netherlands create the Flame of Peace a couple of years ago. At the PFI Summer Symposium in June and later at the URI Netherlands 15th Jubilee in September she presented the Flame of Frith. I continued this wish for peace and met up with the Heathen community. We performed the short ritual and hopefully the flame will continue to spread in Canada. Karen Dales also accepted the Frith Cord for the Wiccan community



(The Flame of Frith with Camille and John – Heathens against Hate)

One of the most striking impromptu events was the Spiral Dance, organised by Catherine Starr. Gathering at the Pagan Meet & Greet the group set off chanting the well-known "Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hekate, Demeter, Kali... Inanna". Traversing the rainbow bridge they crossed from the South to the North Building. Not only indigenous people but others of different faiths (and none) joined in. The dance ended with a big group hug



(Catherine Starr and Karen Dales leading the spiral dance)



(After the Spiral Dance [Courtesy: K. Dales])

There were so many poignant moments but on Wednesday November 7, it was time to say goodbye. After the closing plenary, see:

https://www.facebook.com/parliamentofreligions/videos/2297555433651027/

we gathered our things together and said our good-byes. In the best Wiccan tradition Catherine & Karen summed it up:

Merry meet and merry part, and merry meet again... Blessed Be!



(Karen Dales, Catherine Starr, and Sandy Foo [Courtesy: K. Dales])

REFERENCES:

Witchfest North:

 $\underline{\text{https://www.facebook.com/witchfestnorth/photos/p.1046629428830720/1046629428830720/?type=1\&theater}$

URI Multiregion:

 $\frac{\text{https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=}562544894208722\&set=gm.1954408138000769\&type=1\&text{1}{2} + 1.5 + 1$

Personal video of the opening PWR 2018:

https://photos.google.com/photo/AF1QipME7Cjfg9bCPXjWq8xkkKq63qMu0zm6PhEJ3eiO

Parliament of the World's Religions – you tube channel, with many of the keynote speakers, panels of this year's Parliament

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsAFu6LwroZZVJWJWHJRXIg and Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/parliamentofreligions/

Closing plenary: https://www.facebook.com/parliamentofreligions/videos/2297555433651027/

Samhain image: https://i.pinimg.com/originals/37/59/83/3759830079a543a31ccc339cedef15f7.jpg

LIVESTREAMING with the URI Communications Team Sari, Erin, Patrick & Morgana *Live streaming links:*

Good Morning! We are live this morning from the URI Hospitality Space at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Toronto, Canada. Today we feature interviews with Sarah Oliver from the Cape Town Interfaith Initiative, Aline LaFlamme from the Interspiritual Sustainability Society, and Emerson Finkle from the Interfaith Chapel at the University of Rochester. #URI2018PoWR #2018Powr Sari, Erin & Patrick FRIDAY 02-nov-18

https://www.facebook.com/unitedreligionsinitiative/videos/350057829099650/

Patrick, Aline LaFlamme& Emerson

https://www.facebook.com/unitedreligionsinitiative/videos/721438101563351/

Good morning! URI Live at the Parliament of World's Religions. This morning we will feature interviews with Valeria Vergani from the Inspiritual Sustainability Council, Girish Shah from the Silicon Valley Interreligious Council, and Greg Davis from Safe Alliance of Interfaith Leaders. #URI2018PoWR #2018PoWR

Patrick, Morgana, Valerie, Girish Shah & Greg Davis **SATURDAY 03-nov-18** https://www.facebook.com/unitedreligionsinitiative/videos/285933762262013/

Live from the Parliament of the World's Religions, this morning we feature interviews with today's presenters: Rebecca Prows from Interfaith Cafe on Storytelling in Interfaith Engagement and Rev Lauren Van Hamm from the Chaplaincy Institute on Building a Global Environmental Network. #URI2018PoWR Patrick, Morgana, Rebecca Prows & Lauren van Ham SUNDAY 04-nov-18

https://www.facebook.com/unitedreligionsinitiative/videos/741455586218061/

Morgana, Susan Solvay & Patrick... also about Pato's double CD **MONDAY 05-nov-18** VIA URI Environmental cc

https://www.facebook.com/morganasythove/videos/10156873788708179/

Good morning from the final full day of the Parliament! We have Besha Blondin from Pull Together Now and Rev. Fletcher Harper from Green Faith – both will be talking about our responsibility for taking care of Mother Earth and the role of Indigenous people in the leadership of that movement.

Patrick, Morgana, Besha Blondin, Rev Fletcher, ... and presentation of the World Peace Flower to the URI Family. **TUESDAY 06-nov-18**

https://www.facebook.com/unitedreligionsinitiative/videos/279019422745959/

• Involvement of URI – more than 30 panels, workshops etc

Recordings still available via FB

See FB Multiregion: https://www.facebook.com/groups/URImultiregion/

And FB United Religions Initiative, videos:

https://www.facebook.com/pg/unitedreligionsinitiative/videos/?ref=page_internal

ENCC panel "Building a Global Environmental Network" - 3 links:

ENCC panel video with Rebecca, Swamini Sadhvi Adityananda Saraswati and Paula Looking Horse https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mwHHPCdqY0cQhhBSh10xSq-kqKBf4hvV/view

With Bill Swing, Abhirup Khan and Lauren van Ham

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1fFbBnu554x6expYp8cGjVN4r0mHMqGqm

Morgana, and Rebecca closing words

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Q2-7G2r-vfYqzJe1eudkcVSSdolaJZ7i

Pato Banton and the URI Global Family "All in this together":

https://soundcloud.com/unitedreligionsinitiative/sets

Karen Dales: "Column: The View from Pagan Meet and Greet at PWR":

https://wildhunt.org/2018/11/column-the-view-from-pagan-meet-and-greet-at-pwr.html?fbclid=IwAR0j-SYy7Pnp0oLkuLJcdhvlMGSDDkFO7PCJy9jxin5JFcwm5JhtZex7GgQ

Spiral dance at PWR:

Lisa Wasilkowsky Malik: https://www.facebook.com/lmewm/videos/10156409209150546/

Rowan Fairgrove: https://www.facebook.com/rowanfair/videos/10156097995678681/

Twila York: https://www.facebook.com/twila.york/videos/10106790620528942/

Websites:

PFI: www.paganfederation.org

PWR: https://www.parliamentofreligions.org/

URI: http://uri.org/

Pato Banton: http://patobanton.com/